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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR X0XX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
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PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

The media highlighted the continued Israel-Hamas confrontation along the Gaza border: an air strike killed four members of a mortar crew; a Sderot resident was wounded by a Qassam rocket. Israel Radio reported that today the crossings with Gaza are closed following the rocket attacks. Leading media reported that Ashdod is prepared to

endure rocket attacks. HaQaretz reported that yesterday senior IDF officers criticized certain cabinet ministers for beating the drum for military action in Gaza. Yesterday The Jerusalem Post quoted PM Ehud Olmert as saying that the GOI would continue to step up pressure on Hamas by keeping Gaza border crossings closed and taking unsuspected measures. Yesterday Yediot reported that Egyptian authorities secured Hamas's consent to renew the truce agreement with Israel. The newspaper also reported that Olmert will meet with PA President Mahmoud Abbas today (Monday).

Leading media reported that yesterday the High Court of Justice instructed settlers occupying a house in Hebron to evacuate it within three days, but that a coalition of right-wing organizations, Knesset members, and West Bank rabbis said that they plan to oppose the move firmly. HaQaretz quoted a participant as saying during the meeting: QIf the house is evacuated, there will be Amona part two here,Q referring to the February 2006 clashes between settlers and security forces during the evacuation of a West Bank outpost.

All media (banner in The Jerusalem Post) reported that Water Authority head Prof. Uri Shani warned the cabinet yesterday that water rationing for household use would be introduced this spring if this winter is a dry one. He added that recent forecasts for the region are not optimistic.

Yesterday The Jerusalem Post reported that New York Sen. Hillary Clinton has leaped to the top of the list of candidates to become secretary of state. The newspaper quoted Doug Bloomfield, a former AIPAC legislative director, as saying: QFor Israel, I think this would be win-win.

Yediot reported that Stuart Levey, the Treasury Department's Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, arrived in Israel yesterday. Levey, who is in charge of economic sanctions against Iran, met with the Mossad leadership and FM Tzipi Livni.

Leading media reported that cabinet minister Ami Ayalon is not likely to join Meretz. Some media reported that he will head Meimad, the moderate religious party that has been an ally of Labor. The media highlighted Likud's renaissance at a central committee meeting last night. Newcomers there, in particular Benny Begin, were warmly applauded there. Israel Radio reported that influential former Likud MK Uzi Landau has switched to Yisrael Beiteinu. Maariv reported that Shlomo Deri, the brother of former Shas leader Aryeh Deri, is establishing a party that Aryeh would lead from the outside.

Leading media reported that British FM David Miliband arrived in Israel yesterday for a two-day visit. HaQaretz reported that he is expected to express strong opposition to West Bank settlements. The newspaper reported that FM Tzipi Livni told Miliband that the supervision over goods from the West Bank is exaggerated. Miliband told The Jerusalem Post that Iran is feeling the impact of sanctions. Yesterday HaQaretz reported that the Institute for Science and International Security recently released a report urging U.S. President-elect Barack Obama to take a number of measures to avoid nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, including convincing Israel to halt production of nuclear weapons.

Yesterday HaQaretz reported that John Ging, the director of the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestinian refugees in Gaza, told the newspaper last week that Israel's policies are strengthening the stance of extremists there.

HaQaretz reported that Hamas has dramatically reduced its money transfers to various charitable organization in the West Bank formerly linked to the group, as the PA continues to assert its control over those organizations.

Yesterday HaQaretz reported that last week an important U.S. web site revealed the name of one of the candidates for the next head of Shin Bet. According to the Shin Bet Law, the names of organization employees, with the exception of the head, are prohibited from publication in Israel. Yediot reported that billionaire Arkady Gaidamuk's party will take part in the Knesset elections.

Over the weekend The Jerusalem Post, Maariv, and HaQaretz reported

that Russia is considering purchasing Israeli unmanned aerial vehicles. Yesterday Yediot reported that Israel will refurbish Boeing 767-300 aircraft for the Japanese company Mitsui and that it may sell advanced security systems to the UN Procurement Branch.

Citing the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, The Jerusalem Post quoted the King of Bahrain as saying in New York that he would facilitate the return of Jewish expatriates through restored citizenship and land offers.

Maariv reported that senior Israeli public figures from all political persuasions have written PM Ehud Olmert asking that he raise the issue of convicted spy Jonathan Pollard in his last meeting with President Bush.

Mideast:

Summary:

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: QWe can only hope that America's first black president will remind the Israelis of what happened to the Bantustans.... To ensure that the Jews do not get carried away in their rejoicing, it is important for Obama to point this out even before the polls in divided Jerusalem kick off, and to reveal his peace plan.

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QIn the first stage, the IDF would take over Gaza. In the next stage, it would turn it over to a pan-Arab force. In the third stage, the pan-Arab force would turn it over to the soldiers of the Palestinian Authority.

Intelligence affairs correspondent Yossi Melman wrote in Ha'aretz: QThe discovery of enriched uranium at the Syrian military site that Israel bombed last year may be the first step toward revealing SyriaQs smoking gun.
The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: QIt's good ... that the Saudis say they're self-conscious about what Islamist violence has done to the image of the Muslim faith. How sad that these moves come at a pace so glacially slow. But, of course, better late than never.

Block Quotes:

I. " Hamas Is Waiting for Netanyahu"

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (11/17): QIn an article in the East Jerusalem newspaper Al-Ayyam, [veteran Palestinian columnist Hani al-]Masri analyzed the reasons for the failure of the Egyptian-mediated reconciliation talks between Hamas and Fatah. He claimed that Hamas, which has not succeeded in ending the rule of PA President Mahmoud Abbas before the end of his term in January 2009, has decided to wait for Netanyahu's second term, to start a month later.
Why should Hamas pay a high price, such as recognizing Israel, wrote Masri, when in a few months from now Netanyahu will be sending Abbas to drink the Dead Sea? Obama's reaction to Netanyahu's ideas for an Qoverall peaceQ was not available at the time of this writing. We can only hope that America's first black president will remind the Israelis of what happened to the Bantustans -- the black enclaves invented by the white apartheid regime in South Africa. To ensure that the Jews do not get carried away in their rejoicing, it is important for Obama to point this out even before the polls in divided Jerusalem kick off, and to reveal his peace plan.

II. "Gaza in Three Stages"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (11/17): QNo matter how you look at the story of the agreement with Hamas ... Hamas has to be removed. The question is whether we can find a responsible body to fill the vacuum that it will leave behind. This returns us to the two-stage

or three-stage idea [proposed to me by a senior minister over six months ago]. In the first stage, the IDF would take over Gaza. In the next stage, it would turn it over to a pan-Arab force. In the third stage, the pan-Arab force would turn it over to the soldiers of the Palestinian Authority. This idea, which sounded surreal only six months ago, sounds a bit more reasonable today, when the PA soldiers who were trained by the Americans in Jordan control Jenin well, and are successfully wiping out the Hamas nests in the southern Hebron hills. The chances are not great, but the alternative, of sending the IDF into Gaza in order to stay, is less attractive. Patience, Ehud Barak says to his colleagues. Remember July 12, 2006. Don't engage in hard-line rhetoric. Perhaps this time he is right.

III. "Syria and the Iranian Path"

Intelligence affairs correspondent Yossi Melman wrote in Ha'aretz (11/16): QThe discovery of enriched uranium at the Syrian military site that Israel bombed last year may be the first step toward revealing Syria's smoking gun.... Pushing Syria into the corner is reminiscent of what happened to Iran. Tehran also denied at first that it had built hidden nuclear facilities.... When the truth finally emerged, Iran was forced to admit the existence of the sites, but continued to deny that they were being used for nuclear activity. As it was confronted with ever more facts, it continued weaving its web of lies, until the IAEA finally labeled it a non-compliant country that had violated its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the UN Security Council imposed sanctions on it. Syria is still far from that point, but the discovery of uranium at the bombed site could be a turning point. It could be the first step toward finding the smoking gun that incriminates Damascus in the international community, and strengthens Israel's claim that its own operation was necessary and justified to prevent Syria from developing a nuclear weapon.

IV. "The King & Peres"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (11/17): QThe [interfaith] conference [in New York], like similar Saudi gestures of late, must fundamentally be understood in the context of the country's efforts to raise its regional profile. This involves actively seeking a role as peacemaker. It involves, too, a well-orchestrated bid for political influence by a country worried by waning economic influence. As the world's largest oil exporter, after all, the Saudi government is understandably anxious about falling oil prices, and the consequent diminishment of political clout. That said, the symbolism of King Abdullah sitting through a speech by President Peres last Wednesday and later dining in the same hall together sends an encouraging message. It's good, too, that the Saudis say they're self-conscious about what Islamist violence has done to the image of the Muslim faith. How sad that these moves come at a pace so glacially slow. But, of course, better late than never.

CUNNINGHAM